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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001269

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SUBJECT: ALL SMILES: PM KHIN NYUNT'S TRIP TO SINGAPORE

REF: RANGOON 1237

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt made a recent trip to Singapore--part official, part medevac--in what the regime views as another successful effort to garner ASEAN support for the SPDC's road map to democracy. End Summary.

2. (SBU) On September 20 the COM and P/E chief called on the Singaporean Ambassador to Burma, Simon Tesning de Cruz, to discuss Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt's September 12-17 trip to Singapore. De Cruz joined the PM's high-level delegation for the trip, which included then-Foreign Minister Win Aung and sundry GOB senior officials, and participated in all official events during the visit. (Comment: De Cruz said that Win Aung, who was sacked the day after his return to Rangoon (reftel), was noticeably "withdrawn and distracted" during the Singapore trip. End Comment.)

3. (C) According to de Cruz, General Khin Nyunt's primary reason for visiting Singapore was to undergo "keyhole surgery" to remove gall bladder stones (Note: The Burmese regime's official press did not address the medical aspects of the trip. End Note). However, Khin Nyunt also conducted official business, which included bilateral meetings with President Nathan, Prime Minister Lee, and Senior Minister Goh. PM Lee also hosted an official dinner for Khin Nyunt and his entourage.

4. (C) General Khin Nyunt stuck to carefully crafted talking points, said de Cruz, delivering a rote explanation of the SPDC's road map to democracy. The Burmese PM was upbeat, describing the National Convention as "off to a good start," but acknowledged that discussions with the cease-fire ethnic groups were "delicate." Khin Nyunt said that Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and the NLD had refused to attend the Convention (which Khin Nyunt said will reconvene in January 2005) and "have been making problems ever since by discrediting the road map process." De Cruz opined that Khin Nyunt's derisive comments about the NLD, including a threat "to do something about the party's contact with the ethnic groups," were an ominous sign that the SPDC is prepared to crack down further on the pro-democracy movement.

5. (C) Khin Nyunt also made a pitch for an increase in Singaporean investment in Burma. According to Ambassador de Cruz, Minister Goh replied that Singapore would like to support greater economic investment, but observed that regional competition and a poor business climate inside Burma would continue to impede would-be investors. (Note: De Cruz said that about only 125 Singaporean investors currently operate in Burma, down from about 400 four years ago, and new investment has dwindled to less than USD six million per year. End Note.)

6. (C) Ambassador de Cruz said that senior GOS officials told Khin Nyunt that Singapore supported the SPDC's road map process, but urged the regime to develop a timeline and to be more inclusive, particularly by ensuring ASSK and NLD participation, in order for the international community, especially the United States and the EU, to view the results as credible. PM Lee also told Khin Nyunt that the SPDC needed to work with the United Nations, particularly Special Envoy Razali.

7. (SBU) Comment: The regime gave standard, high-profile press coverage to Khin Nyunt's Singapore trip, highlighting photos of the smiling Prime Minister with his new Singaporean counterpart and emphasizing the latter's purported comments that Singapore "understands the challenges and problems" Burma faces with its democratization process. Regardless of what was said behind closed doors, or even in a subsequent GOS statement in which PM Lee noted that he had raised international and regional concerns about the situation in Burma, Khin Nyunt and the SPDC view the trip as another successful effort to garner ASEAN support for the regime's road map. Embassy Singapore observes that the visit, characterized by the GOS as a perfunctory introductory call, received minimal local press coverage and the GOS, in the absence of any agreements or real substance, would not share the Burmese regime's more glorified view of events. End Comment.

18. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy
Singapore.
Martinez